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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3239
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2625
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000120

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PROMINENT KYRGYZ COMMENT ON MANAS CLOSURE

REF: BISHKEK 110

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The future of Manas Air Base has been topic number one following President Bakiyev's February 3 announcement that he would close the Base. In addition to the intense media coverage (Reftel), many prominent Kyrgyz have spoken publicly, both in support of Bakiyev's position, as well as against closing the Base. Statements in favor of closing the Base emphasize that Kyrgyzstan is acting within its legal rights, that the situation in Afghanistan has improved, and that the economic benefits accruing to Kyrgyzstan from the base are minimal, while the environmental and human costs are significant. Public statements criticizing Bakiyev's announcement question whether Russia will honor its assistance promises, argue that doubling Kyrgyzstan's foreign debt is a bad idea, and question the wisdom of becoming a vassal state of Russia. Several commentators also speculate, both publicly and on internet forums, that the United States will now begin actively cooperating with the opposition. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Following is a compilation of public statements made over the past week by prominent Kyrgyz officials, opposition figures, and political commentators.

Pro-Base Closure

13. (SBU) Adakhan Madumarov, Secretary of the State Security Council, said "We hope that the USA is a civilized country . . . there are intergovernmental rules, they should be . . . exactly observed," and added that U.S. troops will leave the country within 180 days from when diplomatic notes are exchanged. Madumarov also denied that the decision to close the base was made in Moscow, and said that "such decisions are not taken spontaneously. They are accumulated for many years, and then are taken."

14. (SBU) Azizbek Tursunbai, Vice Speaker of Parliament, said that the mission of the base is complete. "All of the

elected branches of government have existed in Afghanistan for several years." "It is too soon to make predictions on the consequences of closing the base. The Americans themselves now say that Guantanamo Bay was illegal, and President Obama plans to shut it down." "The withdrawal of the Base will not affect the development of our cooperation in other areas."

¶5. (SBU) Ulugbek Ormonov, the head the of ruling Ak Jol party faction in Parliament, claimed that the closure of Manas Air Base will not affect relations with the United States. "Kyrgyzstan made a significant contribution to the fight against terrorism." "In Afghanistan, there is now a central government, and it has become a legal process. There are other ways to deliver humanitarian supplies."

¶6. (SBU) Iskhak Masaliyev, the leader of the Communist party in Parliament, said that closure of the Base means that Kyrgyzstan has made a strategic choice in favor of Russia. In a separate interview, Masaliyev said that "the U.S. is losing ground under its feet in Kyrgyzstan, they need to search for new spheres of influence, and that is why the withdrawal of the airbase could be followed by the activation of cooperation with the opposition."

¶7. (SBU) Nurlan Motuyev, co-chair of the Muslim Union, said that Bakiyev's decision to close the Base will increase his popularity with the people. "The Base has brought no benefit to Kyrgyzstan." "The Muslim Union has been striving for the closure of the Base for a long time; this is our achievement too."

¶8. (SBU) Tusrunbay Bakir uulu, the co-chair of the Muslim

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Union and a former Ombudsman, said that no one should be allowed to kill citizens and damage the environment with impunity. (Note: Bakir uulu is referring to the fatal shooting of a Kyrgyz fuel truck driver by an Air Base guard in 2006, and to Kyrgyz concern over the emergency dumping of fuel by coalition aircraft. End note.) "The decision to close the Air Base deserves credibility in the eyes of the world public, because it prevents the departure of planes from Kyrgyzstan to bomb peaceful civilians in Afghanistan." "I think President Obama would welcome such a move, because he announced that he would engage in dialogue with all states, regardless of their political systems."

Against the Base Closure

¶9. (SBU) Osmonakun Ibraimov, a former State Secretary under the Akayev government, publicly worried that Kyrgyzstan would become like Georgia. "If Russia wants to enter into a geopolitical struggle with America and the West, that's its problem, but to enter into this process for a loan, which not only will not solve our economic problems, but will double our debt burden, is categorically not worth it."

¶10. (SBU) Omurbek Tekebayev, the leader of the opposition Ata Meken party, criticized the President's "primitive" language in explaining the Base closure as due to insufficient money from the United States. Tekebayev said Bakiyev showed naivete in believing that the Russians are providing aid out of kindness, and that Bakiyev should have negotiated special treatment for the Kyrgyz working in Russia. "Such radical changes in foreign policy can lead to changes in the development of democracy." "The Ata Meken party will give its opinion on the Base closure in the next few days."

¶11. (SBU) Valentin Bogatyrev, a political analyst, criticized the deal with Russia, saying that in giving up control of the Dastan torpedo plant and Kyrgyzstan's hydropower assets, in exchange for debt forgiveness and \$1.7 billion that the Kyrgyz still might not receive, "We risk

losing the remnants of our sovereignty."

¶12. (SBU) Bakyt Beshimov, a deputy from the opposition Social Democratic party (SDPK), said that the presence of the Base meets the national interests of Kyrgyzstan. "The decision to close the Base should have been made in a government session. While Bakiyev was flying to Moscow, government officials here were saying that Base closure was not on the agenda." "Members of the political elite should ask themselves: To what extent does Bakiyev's decision meet the country's long-term national interests?" In a separate interview, Beshimov speculated that "following the withdrawal of the base, the U.S. could make an attempt to more actively cooperate with the Kyrgyz opposition in order to influence the government."

¶13. (SBU) Alikbek Jekshenkulov, a former foreign minister and leader of the opposition movement "For Justice," said that Bakiyev's statement in Moscow shows the indetermination and unpredictability of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy, and added that it is dangerous for a small country like Kyrgyzstan to play games with great powers.

¶14. (SBU) Azimbek Beknazarov, the leader of the opposition United People's Movement, said "Americans will now step up their activities supporting so-called democratic institutions." "If the American Base is being closed, the Russian base should be closed also. Kyrgyzstan should be neutral, like Turkmenistan."

¶15. (SBU) Miroslav Niyazov, former Secretary of the State Security Council, said that "withdrawal of the Manas antiterrorist coalition airbase from Kyrgyzstan runs counter to this country's national interests."

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Internet Comments

¶16. (SBU) Users of the popular Diesel internet forum (diesel.elcat.kg) made the following points:

--The Americans will soon start another color revolution, or will select another president.

--Skeptical that Bakiyev will follow through on his announcement -- one can say something quickly, but then do it very slowly.

--The loss of jobs at the Base is one more drop in the bucket: In March, people's patience will run out.

--Anger at selling Dastan plant to the Russians (and resorts to the Kazakhs, mountains to the Chinese, and water to the Uzbeks)

--Offered to bet money that Tekebayev is already talking with the State Department, and said that the U.S. would say that events show that there is no democracy in Kyrgyzstan: There was earlier, but it ended when Bakiyev "flipped them off."

--I hope he (Bakiyev) will keep to his guiding principle: word given, word taken back (slovo dal, slovo vernul.)

--It might be good that Bakiyev drove the American Base from Kyrgyzstan. Previously, the U.S. turned a blind eye to the totalitarian government of Kyrgyzstan. Now, they have nothing to lose, and will promote democracy with full force.

Comment

¶17. (C) Much of the public comment splits along political lines, with government and ruling party officials supporting Bakiyev's announcement, while many from the opposition are

looking to use the Base question to advance their own political agendas. Some comments in private conversations have been even stronger. Former Foreign Minister Jekshenkulov said he was outraged by the deal to close the Base. He said he would lead an "action" protesting against closing the Base, and he predicted that Bakiyev would not remain in power for long. In a separate conversation, Former Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the U.S. Roza Otunbayeva also said she was outraged by the Russian financial package; she accused Bakiyev of "selling the country to the Russians."

GFOELLER